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SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING: COUNCIL FOCUSES ON QUARTET AND UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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¶1. Summary: In delivering the UN's monthly briefing on the situation in the Middle East on September 20, U/SYG Lynn Pascoe characterized the continuing Olmert/Abbas dialogue, Secretary Rice's current trip to the Middle East and Quartet

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Representative Tony Blair's work as elements of a genuinely promising push for peace. But he said Israel's September 19 decision to consider the Gaza Strip an "enemy entity" -- would, if carried out, constitute a violation of international and humanitarian law. He also repeated UN concern about the negative social, economic and political consequences of a divided Palestine. On Lebanon, Pascoe condemned the September 19 terrorist act that took the life of Lebanese MP Antoine Ghanem and seven others, describing it as an effort to undermine Lebanese stability, and reported on Secretary-General Ban's efforts to encourage Lebanese leaders

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to reach an agreement on a president.

¶2. In closed consultations, the majority of Council members criticized Israel's September 19 designation of the Gaza Strip as an "enemy entity." Many expressed great concern about the humanitarian consequences that would follow from Israel's threat to withhold delivery of fuel and electricity.

Russian PR Churkin stated that "one member of the Quartet" had blocked the group from calling on Israel to reconsider its decision. Council members offered views on the content of the upcoming September 23 Quartet meeting and the international meeting announced July 16 by President Bush to be held later this year. Suggestions for a successful outcome of the international conference ranged from including "all" actors to addressing "all" issues. Russia said Moscow plans to host an international conference at some point in the future, as well. Belgium cautioned that the goals of the international conference should be reasonably defined so as to manage expectations. The UK offered a five-point proposal for what might be achieved by year's end as a result of the Quartet and international meetings. Council members were unanimous in condemning the September 19 terrorist attack that took the life of Lebanese MP Antoine Ghanem and seven others. End Summary.

Pascoe Sees Promising Push for Peace

¶3. In the Secretariat's monthly "Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East," held September 20, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe said that a new and genuinely promising push for peace is underway but that the situation on the ground remains of deep concern. Pascoe identified as promising the continuing bilateral dialogue between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas that has resulted in an agreement to set up

negotiating teams to transform discussions into an agreed text, Secretary Rice's current trip to the region to take stock of progress and to encourage further effort, and Quartet representative Tony Blair's work on developing an agenda for economic revival and institutional reform. He expressed concern, however, about continuing violence among Palestinians and between Israelis and Palestinians, human rights abuses at the hands of paramilitary Hamas forces in Gaza, and President Abbas' rule by decree. These internal Palestinian problems are a result of the division of Palestinian territories.

¶4. On Israeli-Palestinian violence, Pascoe condemned continued indiscriminate rocket fire against civilians in Israel. In noting the Israeli security cabinet's September 29 declaration of Gaza as an "enemy entity" and its intention to interrupt essential services such as electricity and fuel to the civilian population, Pascoe said that such steps, if implemented, would violate Israel's obligations towards the civilian population under international humanitarian and human rights law. Other areas of ongoing concern, Pascoe said, include an increase in obstacles to freedom of movement in the West Bank, continuing settlement construction on both sides of the separation barrier, Israel's failure to take action against outpost construction, and the continuing construction of the separation barrier contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

¶5. Pascoe said that the Palestinian Authority is working to impose law and order, institute reform and good governance, and improve living conditions. The resumption of Israeli transfers of Palestinian tax revenue has made possible the payment of public sector salaries in the West Bank and Gaza. Nevertheless, he noted, a recent World Bank report had documented a comprehensive drop in socio-economic indicators throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Key to reversing the trend, Pascoe said, is the full implementation of the November 2005 Agreement on Access and Movement to

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facilitate exports and to enable the inflow of foodstuffs.

¶6. Turning to regional issues, Pascoe noted that a number of Arab League states and the Arab League Secretary-General had stressed that the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue must end with substantive results if it is to receive Arab support and if it is to be the basis of a successful international meeting. The international meeting itself must be comprehensive in nature. Pascoe also reported Syria's allegation to the Secretary-General of a September 6 breach of Syrian airspace

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by Israel as well as the fact that Israel has not commented on the allegations. Finally, Pascoe reiterated the Secretary-General's strong condemnation of the September 19

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terrorist act that took the life of Lebanese MP Antoine Ghanem and seven others, an act aimed at undermining Lebanon's stability. A letter from Prime Minister Siniora requesting that the United Nations Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) extend its assistance in the investigation of the crime has been forwarded to the Security Council. Additionally, Pascoe noted positively the end of fighting in and around Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, urged member states to respond to the new UNRWA Emergency Flash Appeal and reported the Secretary-General's work to encourage Lebanese leaders to reach an agreement on a President. Pascoe ended his briefing by expressing the hope that the upcoming September 23 Quartet Meeting and "iftar" with a number of Arab League nations and the September 24 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting will help bring about agreements and steps on implementation that will help catalyze changes on the ground.

Security Council Members Comments

17. In the Security Council's closed consultations following Pascoe's open briefing, Security Council members focused on three issues: Israel's September 19 designation of the Gaza Strip as an "enemy entity" and its stated intention to cut back power and fuel supplies to such an entity; the Quartet meeting to be held September 23 at the UN and the international meeting that President Bush announced July 16 to be held later this year; and the September 19 terrorist act that took the life of Lebanese MP Antoine Ghanem on the eve of the Lebanese Presidential election.

Israeli Designation of Gaza as "Enemy Entity"

18. Every member alluded either directly or indirectly to Israel's designation of the Gaza Strip as an "enemy entity." Qatar spoke strongly in disapproval of the designation. In its intervention, Qatari PR Nasser said that Israel's action contradicted its statements that Israel desired peace. Actions such as these, Israel's recent raid on Syria, which was also a flagrant violation of international law, and Israel's continuing illegal blockade of Gaza, which deprived Gazans of basic needs indicated neither good will nor good intentions, Nasser said. He added that it is "illogical to starve and punish the Palestinian people and ask for their participation in the peace process."

19. Echoing U/SYG Pascoe's remarks on the issue, South Africa, Indonesia, Congo and Peru all said that Israel's designation of the Gaza Strip as an "enemy entity" and its stated intention to withhold fuel and electricity would constitute, if carried out, a violation of international and/or humanitarian law. Congo and Peru argued that all Gazans should not be forced to suffer because of the actions of a few. Belgium, in comments echoed by Peru, cautioned against isolating Gaza, arguing that 1.5 million Gazans cannot be ignored. Rather Belgium continued, the UN should strengthen Abbas by allowing him to "deliver" to the Palestinians. China said that labeling and isolating Gaza is not helpful and will aggravate the humanitarian crisis. Russian PR Churkin said Israel's isolation of Gaza would have a disproportionate impact on civilians and urged all to help in preventing a major humanitarian disaster. Churkin, recalling that UN Secretary-General Ban and the EU have both requested that Israel reconsider its designation of Gaza as an "enemy entity," acidly observed that one member of the Quartet prevented the Quartet from such action. In milder terms, Slovakia commended Israel for its restraint in the face of "terrorist acts" from Gaza and called on Hamas to end its illegal actions and its "destructive policy," but at the criticized the decision too consider Gaza an "enemy entity."

Hopes for Quartet Meeting, International Conference

10. Most delegations welcomed the upcoming September 23 Quartet Meeting and the international conference as

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opportunities to be utilized to move the process of peace firmly forward. Several members offered suggestions to strengthen the effectiveness of the meetings. Italy urged the Security Council to offer stronger political support for the peace process, in order to facilitate the flow of emergency assistance to Palestinians. Italy also urged that "all actors" be included in the international meeting called for by President Bush. Belgium urged Security Council members to manage expectations of these meetings by defining hoped for achievements. Indonesia warned that the peace process would not be successful until "all" parties are ready for peace and the three key issues -- East Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, and West Bank settlements -- are addressed.

¶11. Russian PR Churkin said that the international conference should focus on the Palestinian crisis, halting violent clashes, and restoring one central Palestinian Authority. Churkin said that Russian leaders, who have just visited the Middle East, are developing a leadership role for Russia in the peace process and planned to convene an international conference in the future. He said Russia would be interested in learning from Secretary Rice the findings of her current visit to the region and the details about preparations for the international conference. UK PR Sawers announced five goals the UK hopes will be achieved the end of the year: (1) an agreement to start negotiations, not just talks, by early 2008; (2) a commitment by both Israelis and Palestinians to implement further confidence-building measures; (3) increased direct engagement by Arab governments; (4) international support for the program to be developed by Tony Blair to build Palestinian Authority government capacity; and (5) significant financial support by the international community.

¶12. Delivering the U.S. intervention, Ambassador Khalilzad reiterated Secretary Rice's remark that we "view Gaza and the West bank as constituent entities of a future Palestinian state" and that "the legitimate government of Gaza is ultimately that of the Palestinian Authority." He said that although we regard Hamas as a hostile entity, we will make every effort to deal with the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza. He said that the U.S. will not abandon the people of Gaza and will work with Israel to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Ambassador Khalilzad said that the U.S. sees the purpose of the upcoming Quartet and international meeting as lending international and regional diplomatic support to the efforts of the parties to resolve their differences.

Condemnation of Terrorism in Lebanon

¶13. Ambassador Khalilzad, speaking for the majority of members, condemned in the strongest possible terms the September 19 assassination of yet another Lebanese Parliamentarian, Antoine Ghanem, and at least seven others. He called for an immediate end to the use of intimidation tactics and violence as tools to subvert the democratic process in Lebanon. He said that Lebanese elections, scheduled to begin within days, must be allowed to occur without threats and foreign interference, and must be free, fair and held on-time and according to the Lebanese constitution. He urged Lebanese parliamentarians to fulfill their constitutional duty to vote for a new president and called on Syria and Iran to cease their unhelpful tactics in Lebanon, saying that the U.S. would condemn all efforts to destabilize Lebanon. France said that the plan of those who hoped to intimidate Lebanese citizens through terrorism would not work. There was unanimous support for Lebanon's request for UNIIIC assistance to Lebanese authorities for the investigation of Ghanem's assassination.

KHALILZAD